

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.

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OF WORDS AND NAILS

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Currently, one of my assignments is translating letters written by Juan Bandini, dating from 1841 to 1859, in connection with the restoration of the Casa de Bandini/Cosmopolitan Hotel. Translating historical documents is a fun challenge because sometimes you need to learn about things you never thought you would need to know, in order to translate the documents better. This was the case of a very interesting letter I came across that Bandini wrote to his son-in-law Abel Stearns in 1841 stating he was sending him some blacksmithing tools:

I am sending you with the wagon the pieces of the forge that I am enumerating:

- 1 anvil
- 2 headers
- 9 cold cutting chisels/hot cut chisels and chisels/punches
- 12 dies/taps
- 1 or 2 hammers/hardy
- 11 drill bits

After a few minutes trying to translate this letter I realized that I didn't know what Bandini was talking about--I couldn't picture the

tools he was sending, and it was hard to translate something I had no idea what it looked like or how it was used. Due to my lack of knowledge in blacksmithing (and tools in general) I decided to ask somebody that knew about this matter, so I went to ask Steve Van Wormer, an archaeologist who is currently working on the Cosmopolitan Hotel project, and is a blacksmith.



He was very interested in this letter and helped me with the tool names, but I needed to see the actual tools to better understand them. So he suggested that I talk to the blacksmiths in Old Town. I went to see Todd Caffo and Beth Holmberg who are part of the Living History Program. I told them about the letter and that I needed help with the tools. They were also very interested in this letter because it

showed them the tools that were used back then.

Todd asked me about the items and I gave him the translation I had in English, and he showed me each tool and gave me the correct names. It was so wonderful to be able to see how history was coming alive in Todd's hands, because using the same tools Bandini mentioned in his letter, Todd made a beautifully decorated iron nail from scratch! It all made sense after watching him using the forge and tools and listening to him explain the process. Watching him work made me realize how important blacksmithing was back in the 1800s, and that it is a trade that requires dexterity, knowledge and strength. This experience helped me realize how important the information in that letter is, how valuable the knowledge of the Living History program in Old Town is, how we can help each other to do a better interpretive job, and also appreciate the artistry that is inside every historical object that I, as an archaeologist, find in excavations in Old Town. That was possible thanks to an old letter and a little iron nail.

